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VANDALISM, GRAFFITI OR 'JUST' ROCK ART? THE CASE OF A RECENT ENGRAVING IN THE CÔA VALLEY ROCK ART COMPLEX IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract

A vandalism/graffiti/engraving episode occurred recently in a Côa Valley rock art panel in which a hunter from the region engraved a motif (a defecating horse) superimposing two previously existing prehistoric engravings (one from the Upper Palaeolithic, the other from the Neolithic). We shall argue that the contemporary horse aims to question and satirize the value attributed by archaeologists to the prehistoric motifs inscribed by UNESCO in the World Heritage List. We will discuss and to some degree challenge the predominant point of view regarding the need to erase all graffiti, the value of ('very recent') contemporary motifs and ultimately how rock art researchers understand not only



their discipline of study but also the very concept of rock art aesthetic appreciation. While this may be a highly controversial issue, we intend to question a dogmatic stance in which rock art sites are seen as static manifestations of a dead past, incapable of shaping and establishing dynamic live connections with the present and subsequently the future. We believe this to be a thought provoking case study when considering whether contemporary engraved or painted (graffiti) motifs can be regarded as possessing the significant qualities researchers usually bestow upon older motifs catalogued as *rock art*, and the feelings of different interest groups on the overall value of rock art heritage.

Keywords: Vandalism, Graffiti, Rock Art Conservation



Introduction

Throughout the world, vandalism to rock art sites (or, for that matter, to other cultural heritage sites) is very common¹. Examples of these occurrences and of the array of guidelines that involved professionals use in countering them are recurrent in the specialised literature. Many authors have devoted their efforts to studying measures that can be taken to prevent such actions or examining different ways of restoring vandalised panels. Suitable measures to counter these actions can include contracting on-site guards, cleaning up surfaces with graffiti, fencing the sites or erecting informative panels that appeal to visitors' good sense (see, for instance, SALE and PADGETT 1995; DANGAS 1993; BRUNET ET AL. 1993; GALE and JACOBS 1986; SULLIVAN 1991; LAMBERT 1989: 48-56).

Using as an example an incident that occurred in one of the Côa Valley rock art surfaces, the intent of this paper is to discuss to what extent can graffiti done on rocky surfaces be considered as *rock art*, and, if so, what would be the implications of such an upgrade. Our aim is to examine:

- how to define vandalism and/or graffiti in rock art sites,
- the need to clean or erase *all* the results of these actions and
- the value of recent contemporary engraved or painted motifs (superimposed or not on older depictions).

Although this can be a very controversial issue, we believe that the pertinent case we will present suggests that a (re)-examination of traditional professional ways of understanding rock art sites is needed. In general, we will not question the need to remove modern graffiti from rock art surfaces; we just seriously doubt if *all* contemporary graffiti motifs should be taken out as some may translate different ways

of living (in) culturally significant landscapes, convey meaning and possess aesthetic qualities.

As coordinator of the Côa Valley Conservation Program at the time the horse was depicted, our reaction when approaching rock 17 was of anger and distress. This reaction is more than understandable in someone who devotes his efforts to the preservation and conservation of the remarkable collection of rock art motifs in the Côa Valley. Our first thought was that the horse needed to be removed, the sooner the better. However, as time passed by, we unexpectedly found ourselves engaged in a deeper and not very straightforward analysis of the whole affair, when considering the need to remove the recent inscription. Now, we are not entirely convinced that the graffiti motif should be wiped out. In the following pages, we will try to give an account of the (inner) conflict that ultimately led to a re-appraisal of the significance of the horse motif. Nevertheless, we must emphasize that the resulting point of view is ours alone. In the course of the paper, namely in the discussion, we will sometimes play 'devil's advocate' when trying to understand the motivations of today's 'artist'. It will be an **attempt** to impartially assess the whole affair and **should not be taken as any kind of endorsement or approval of acts of vandalism/graffiti in any rock art site.**

Definition of Vandalism and Graffiti in Rock Art Sites.

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, *vandalism* can be defined as the "destruction of everything that is scientific or artistic or as damage inflicted upon privately owned property". A more enhanced definition is given by a Portuguese Dictionary (The *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*) when it refers to vandalism also as the destruction of everything that is beautiful. On the other hand, according to the same Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, *graffiti* can be defined as "loose drawings,

¹ For instance, a GOOGLE based search on the expression "vandalized rock art" will produce more than one hundred thousand hits. We believe that searches in other languages besides English will also yield significant results.

doodles and words *with political or social criticism intent*” (author’s emphasis). The Portuguese Dictionary expressly defines graffiti as inscriptions in walls and *ancient monuments*. In fact, the first time the word was presumably used it was in relation to ancient Pompeian inscriptions carved in walls when a XIX century scholar published the work “Graffiti of Pompéi” (JACOBSON 2001). Nowadays, graffiti is also the designation for a (predominately) ‘underground’ urban contemporary art form comprising diverse creative expressions².

In most cases, the distinction between graffiti and vandalism is not as clear-cut as it might seem. Graffiti can sometimes be an act of vandalism, depending on the exact location where graffiti motifs are painted or engraved. At the same time, absolutely classifying graffiti inscriptions as just vandalism acts might be excessive or even unfair. For an environmentalist a sweetheart’s inscription in a tree is a vandalism act while for the carving artist it is a romantic deed. The same way, for the concerned authorities, graffiti painted in trains or train stations might be viewed as the destruction of public (or private) property while for the groups of ‘artists’ they are (also) modern-day forms of artistic expression.

In the rock art research world, the most common approach to this question tends to simply dismiss and classify *all* graffiti that interferes with the previously existing state of a given site or surface as vandalism and therefore as purely negative. Vandalism is understood as anything that destroys the integrity (either physical or conceptual) of a given rock art surface, outcrop or site.

² As there are many references pertaining to a dynamic and expressive phenomenon such as contemporary graffiti, we recommend for an introduction to the subject JACOBSON (2001) or the WIKIPEDIA page on the matter (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti>). BAKER ET AL. (2007) will provide an overview of vanguard art movements rooted in graffiti. DAVID and WILSON (2004) provide a discussion of how graffiti can be perceived as a form of social resistance and of marking a landscape (which graffiti inscription helps to become a ‘signed and owned’ *territory*).

Consequently, making any graffiti on a given rock art surface (either superimposing old motifs or on a previously blank area of the panel) will be viewed as vandalism, akin to malicious touching-up of motifs, removing parts or the totality of panels, shotgun blasts, hammering, etc. that damages the integrity of rock art surfaces. Adding graffiti will alter, so the argument goes, the particular qualities of any rock art surface (its harmony, reading, significance). Even if graffiti is placed on an empty panel of a rock art site, it will affect the integrity and significance of the whole site, understood as the place where the rock art motifs have their complete phenomenological meaning. Therefore, all must be cleaned in order to restore the panel to its former condition. It is also believed that graffiti breeds more graffiti (JACOBS and GALE 1994: 11-12). This kind of attitude regarding graffiti can be found in many approaches by different authors such as in SALE and PADGETT (1995), FORD (1995), DEAN (1999), DANDRIGE and KANE (1999), HOWARD and SILVER (1999), BOSTWICK and DEAN (2000) or LOUBSER and TABOADA (2005).

Conversely, Felton Bricker Sr., a Mojave People elder, displays some of the ambiguities we intend to discuss when he confesses, after stating his vehement disapproval for acts of vandalism, that regarding the need to “conduct conservation on damaged rock art (...) I am of two minds”. Although understanding “the value of restoring rock art sites (...) both for the benefit of the public and (...) to reduce subsequent episodes of vandalism” he declares, invoking his traditional upbringing that “conservation interferes directly with the history of the rock art and the place”. He ends by saying that “Vandalism will have become a part of the place.” (BRICKER ET AL. 1999: 8-9). Another interesting perspective can be found in Cheremisin’s account on how modern generations renovate old motifs in Altai, Southern Siberia. When local inhabitants do it, recreating similar themes of the original rock art, new additions are classified as *authentic*

rock art. When new motifs are done by tourists and establish no rapport with older ones they are classified as *inauthentic* vandalism actions (CHEREMISIN 2002).

Jacobs and Gale speak of *Time* as the ‘granter’ of an ‘untouchable’ status to historical graffiti when they say that:

“The general management trend is to rid art surfaces of as much graffiti as possible so as to avoid encouraging additional acts. But is it valid to remove graffiti which, through time, have gained value as historical artefacts in their own right?” (JACOBS and GALE 1994: 12).

Nevertheless, the scope of their interrogation only reaches historical graffiti (that is, when at least, for instance, an age of a full century can be safely established?). Graffiti from the last couple of decades is thus excluded. If, as the general trend advises, all recent graffiti is removed, none will gain its own value with time and turn itself in to the imagery future scholars might want to study. Pre-historic rock art may well also be considered as ages old graffiti, as CLOTTES ET AL. (1992) remark on some of the Upper Palaeolithic motifs present in Chauvet cave.

Summing up, we believe Murray accurately captures the essence of the debate when he states that

“Modern graffiti are the bane of rock art conservationists, but they mark places in the contemporary landscape just as some prehistoric carvings once did (...) and some may survive to become the “rock art” of the future” (MURRAY 2004: 129).

What can be classified as (pre-historic, or historic or contemporary) art would require discussion at this point. However, defining (rock) art can be a thorny task (as any post-modern reading on the matter will subjectively tell you) and admittedly irrelevant on this occasion. Regarding rock art, suffice to say that a broad definition widely accepted by researchers would classify it as everything inscribed or painted on rock surfaces

possessing no utilitarian value (IFRAO 2009), from cup marks or ‘plain’ drawings and paintings to the exquisite works in the Lascaux or Altamira caves³.

Many rock art custodians already practise case-by-case approach (not entirely) similar to the one we advocate when considering graffiti incidents. Such is the case of the Rouffignac cave in France. Historical graffiti engraved upon Upper Palaeolithic mammoth motifs were not cleaned off (BRUNET ET AL 1993). The 19th century motifs (mainly names and dates) have no great historical significance and, certainly, no aesthetic value, so the only reason for keeping them was their age, (and the authentication they seem to provide). Would this understanding be the same if these inscriptions instead of having an early nineteenth century date had a late 20th century one? Yet another example is El Morro Monument, New Mexico. In a sandstone outcrop known as ‘Inscription Rock’ several historical Spanish ‘conquistadores’ expeditions and Anglo-Saxon settlers inscriptions were engraved on top of older Anasazi and Zuni rock art. Again, here there is no intention of erasing the ‘Pasó por aquí’ old inscriptions (PADGETT and BARTHULI 1995) although SALE and PADGETT (1995) report on how *new ones* are being removed. Again, age determines the importance of graffiti (that gradually will become rock art?) and why it should not be taken out.

Concluding, random factors such as personal or group interests, mindsets, social position

³ We believe the definition put forward by IFRAO (2009) to be an attempt to reach some common ground when characterizing rock art. Nevertheless, can’t (rock) art in itself (also) possess a utilitarian use dimension? For instance, it might provide, even if not consciously intended, a sense of identity, and thus social cohesion, to the society that created it.

See also MORO-ABADÍA and GONZÁLEZ MORALES (2007) for a review of the ‘old’ (and, in our opinion, round and pointless) discussion about the application of the word ‘art’ to the cultural expressions, such as *rock art*, of *other* non-Modern and non-Western societies.

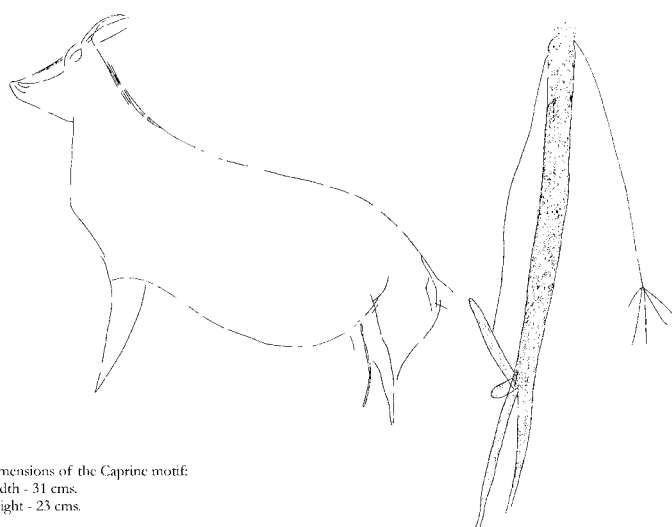
and even nationality (or ethnicity) can decisively influence the perception of what constitutes vandalism and graffiti. Jacobs and Gale comment on a situation on which this subjectivity is patent when they say that “Aboriginal (rock art) site custodians may well consider all non-Aboriginal markings to be vandalism (...) in need of removal” ignoring therefore its value in understanding the patterns of early European colonization of the vast continent of Australia (JACOBS and GALE 1994: 12)⁴.

The case of rock 17 in Penascosa rock art site.

The Penascosa rock art site is part of the Côa Valley rock art complex, inscribed in 1998 by UNESCO in the World Heritage List. According to the most recent data, it comprises some 1000 engraved outcrops (MÁRIO REIS, personal communication). The identified surfaces contain Upper Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Iron Age, Historical and Contemporary motifs. Nevertheless, the Upper Palaeolithic collection is considered the most relevant, due, namely, to aesthetic, scientific and magnitude reasons. This relevance is attested by the fact that UNESCO chose to integrate in the World Heritage List only the Pre-Historic rock art imagery (UNESCO 1999), leaving therefore ‘unlisted’ Historical and Contemporary period motifs. Two of the most interesting (and more relevant to the scope of this paper) characteristics of the Côa Valley rock art are the long span of these artistic manifestations and the many of superposition of motifs, sometimes of different ages. In fact, since Upper Palaeolithic times until the present there has been a long tradition⁵ of engraving

motifs in vertical schist panels, occasionally (but not by chance or randomly⁶) upon already existing ones.⁷

Until the occurrence of the incident we shall discuss, Penascosa rock 17 comprised two distinct motifs: a zoomorphic and an anthropomorphic figure both executed resorting to the engraving technique known as fine line incision (Figure 1).



Dimensions of the Caprine motif:
Width - 31 cms.
Height - 23 cms.

Fig. 1 – Motifs in Penascosa’s Rock 17 before October 2001. (Drawing from BAPTISTA 1999: 112).

According to Baptista, the portrayed animal (a goat) dates back to the Upper Palaeolithic while the anthropomorphic figure has a post-glacial chronology, probably belonging to the Neolithic (BAPTISTA 1999: 112-3). Looking at these primeval motifs, one observes a rather salacious scene. Baptista notes that the human shape is a “strange ithyphallic anthropomorphic representation” (BAPTISTA 1999: 112-3; author’s translation). According to the proposed chronology for both motifs, a goat was

⁴ PALMER (1991: 116) also points out that, generally speaking, historical period motifs – even if as young as the beginning of the 20th century – can be considered as a useful source of information. LUÍS and GARCIA DÍEZ (2008) have proved it when analysing the different views diverse identity groups have on the Côa Valley rock art.

⁵ By long tradition is understood that quite a number of different generations chose to engrave the Côa schists with

motifs (usually) only pertaining to their original context of production. Nevertheless, as it will be argued, one can see Penascosa rock 17 as a case of diachronic cross communication amongst three different ages and cultural traditions.

⁶ See FERNANDES (2008: 86-88).

⁷ For more on the Côa rock art, BAPTISTA and FERNANDES (2007) provide a good starting point.

engraved in this schist outcrop during the Upper Palaeolithic and some millennia later an anthropomorphic figure was added, 'interacting' (in our opinion) with the previous carved animal. Although the goat's motif was, at the time of inscription of the anthropomorphic motif, already worn out and probably not very visible, the precise coordination of the human figure with the goat motif cannot be regarded as a mere coincidence. We consider that the resulting composition, on that matter, speaks for itself. Nevertheless, intrinsic aesthetic, formal and stylistic differences between the two motifs can be easily spotted. The goat clearly belongs to the European Upper Palaeolithic rock art tradition, especially when considering its naturalist style (BAPTISTA 1999). The human figure is a schematic motif more in tune with Post-Glacial European rock art (BAPTISTA 1986).

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In October 2001, someone inscribed in this panel, precisely upon the already existing carvings, a depiction of a horse. Perhaps(?) following the previously referred obscene nature of the panel, the contemporary 'artist' portrayed the horse as being in the act of defecating. Apparently, no relation with the previous figures can be established, besides the fact that this horse was done upon the 'primeval' engravings (see Figure 2). The author of the horse also made a point of signing his(?) name. Consequently, the letter *P*, corresponding to the initial of a first name (*Paulo*, *Pedro*? Another?) and the surname *Matos* can be observed.

Penascosa rock art site has 25 different rock art surfaces distributed in three particular clusters. Two are situated at the foot of a hill and comprise all the engraved outcrops that are shown to visitors by specially trained guides. The other, comprising Rock 17 is located on the top of the same hill. The Penascosa site is 24 hour per day under surveillance by hired security guards, this is a vast area. Therefore, the guard cannot be monitoring all the rocks at the same time, furthermore considering that he has to

monitor guided tours visitors. He has also to monitor the presence in the site of shepherders and their flocks, fishermen and hunters. All these cannot be denied the right to pass, even through an area scheduled as *National Monument* according to Portuguese Cultural Heritage Law⁸.

In the security report for October 5th 2001, the guard states that a party of hunters passed by the site. They descended from the top of the hill and had an aggressive attitude. Their guns were loaded – by law they are obliged to carry their guns open and unloaded when passing through non-hunting areas such as the Penascosa rock art site – and the guard was menaced. Their quarrel was that they had come from far away (from the Vila Real area, some 100 kms to the northwest of the Côa Valley) to hunt and that now due to the restrictions imposed to protect the engravings they could not do it in Penascosa. Since a few days later, when we went on a regular monitoring visit to rock 17, the horse was already present in the panel it is very likely that the graffiti/vandalism 'artist' was in this group although impossible to prove it.



Fig. 2 – Drawing of all motifs now present in Penascosa's Rock 17. Drawing of the horse by the author from digital photography. The horse's drawing was digitally superimposed upon the drawing shown in the preceding Figure.

⁸ On the management and public visitation system to the Côa Valley rock art, see FERNANDES (2003).

Nevertheless, a formal court complaint was filled and the police investigated the matter. Since the hunters said that they had travelled from a particular area, all the hunters from that region with the name starting with the letter *P* and with *Matos* as a surname were investigated. Some rifles and empty shells were even seized! Unfortunately⁹, since all likely suspects provided suitable alibis, the investigation was ruled inconclusive and the complaint archived.

Significance of the Contemporary Equine Motif

Before further considerations it would be helpful to try to establish how the defecating horse can be classified. Is it only an act of vandalism? Is it just graffiti? Or is it all the above but also contemporary 'rock art'? If we resort to the above provided definitions, we find that it is all of the above; it has damaged protected prehistoric rock art so it is an act of vandalism¹⁰. The fact that it is a drawing in conjunction with words all possessing a (more or less hidden) connotation (see below) makes it graffiti. However, can it be more? In the more or less commonly (and tacitly) agreed definition, it cannot be rock art, since it is not old enough and, as it can be argued, has few or no aesthetic qualities or concerns behind its execution. While we are aware that many

readers will dismiss the horse as pure vandalism, we regard it as being more than just that. If we ignore the time factor, and have a broader mind, the defecating horse has everything to be considered as rock art: it denotes some artistic or aesthetic concerns, it was reasonably well thought out, and it carries meaning. Furthermore, it was engraved on a rocky surface.

We believe that what happened in Penascosa's rock 17 is a noteworthy case study when trying to establish what is vandalism, graffiti, or both (and, consequently, 'rock art') by analysing whether it should or should not be erased. We are sure that the horse's engraver knew before commencing his work that there were already motifs in the panel and willingly decided to draw the rather lewd motif on top of them. Rock 17 is located in a steep and very difficult area to access. If we examine the whole outcrop that contains the engraved panel as well as the surrounding outcrops, all with good 'engrivable' surfaces, we notice that they are all empty of other pre-historic or modern engravings. Therefore, chance had nothing to do with this act. On the contrary, it was an intentional and vehement statement more or less carefully thought out and inscribed in the precise spot in which it was intended to feature.

To deepen our analysis we need to examine the discovery and preservation context of the Côa Valley rock art. In the mid 1990's, a dam was being built in the Côa river. Middle way through the construction of the dam, the Côa Valley rock art began to be discovered. As the dam would submerge most of the engravings, a fierce battle for the *in situ* preservation of the art began. A huge majority of the local and regional population supported the construction of the dam, as it would bring (momentary) economic growth and jobs to this underdeveloped area of Portugal. When in 1996, the newly elected government decided to abandon the dam project, preserve the engravings *in situ* and create a state body with the duty of looking after the

⁹ Also because it would be interesting and informative to interview the perpetrator, following the ethno-historic approach already tried in the Côa Valley by LUÍS and GARCÍA DÍEZ (2008).

¹⁰ Nevertheless, if the modern 'artist' just wanted only to vandalise the panel, it would be simpler to completely abrade or paint over the already existing engravings. Therefore, we do not consider that the horse motif can be dismissed as a pure vandalism action, comparable to what has recently occurred in Portugal. Several recent pre-historic panels located in the municipality of Almeida (not within the limits of Côa Valley Archaeological Park but close by) were defaced by direct hammering. These acts have resulted in the *de facto* destruction of the engraved motifs featured in these panels (AMARAL 2009). Conversely, the horse motif has arguably added another layer of meaning to Penascosa rock 17 while leaving the other layers still visible...

conservation of the art¹¹, resentment among the population was high. Most felt that something they did not value at all – the engravings – was being preserved in detriment of the local community expectations of economic development¹².

Therefore, the early antagonism between the PAVC and the local and regional population will paradoxically increase the significance of the defecating horse. We reckon that this motif is a strong statement of rejection, a way of questioning the importance of the Côa Valley rock art and the existence of a state funded organisation created to protect and present to the public the valley's monumental heritage. By depicting a defecating animal, the 'artist' is making a strong statement; that of saying that he 'doesn't give a dam' for the engravings, for the Park and for the nosy city intellectuals (as opposed to the local population that favoured the dam) that advocated the preservation of the engravings. In doing so, he used the same surface that was used before, in two distinct episodes, by Palaeolithic and Neolithic carvers. As he was strongly and keenly stating his opinion on the importance of the engravings, as unconscious as this 're-creation' might have been, he was doing it precisely by 'renewing' the long Côa artistic cycle today, when he added yet another superposition. Furthermore, if we examine the coeval zoomorphic motif alone we see that the 'artist' tried to emulate a horse, one of the themes most represented in the Côa long artistic cycle¹³.

¹¹ The Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa, Côa Valley Archaeological Park – PAVC.

¹² For an analysis and account of this process, see FERNANDES (2003) or FERNANDES and PINTO (2006). Meanwhile, the situation has somewhat changed since the local community began to understand the significance of the Côa rock art, namely when increasing tourism demand of the rock art fostered economic development in the region (see FERNANDES ET AL 2008).

¹³ The depiction of horses is a recurrent theme in the Côa Valley (closely following the 'great' Western Europe Upper Palaeolithic rock art tradition to which it belongs) that roughly

As we noted above, one of the characteristics of the Côa Valley Rock Art is a long engraving tradition that spans several millennia, allied to superimposition of motifs. Each set of superimposed motifs corresponds, presumably, to distinct engraving episodes. Most of them occurred in the Upper Palaeolithic period although some Neolithic or Iron Age motifs superimpose older ones. The motifs from different eras do not have intrinsically anything to do with each other. They were produced in diverse cultural, economic and social contexts as demonstrated by their stylistic or conceptual dissimilarities. Nevertheless, the fact is human beings from completely distinct eras that passed or lived in the Valley, resorted to the schist outcrops to leave their marks for posterity (that now are considered as *art*, more precisely as *rock art*) building one of the most interesting features of the valley's rock art, known today as the Côa millenary engraving tradition.

We can consider the defecating horse as a continuation of that millenary engraving tradition. If, as we believe, the horse was done intentionally this further reinforces the irony subjacent to the whole incident. Furthermore, examining the horse, one of its most striking characteristics is the rather salacious, bad taste or sheer ugliness (in the eyes of a rock art researcher!) behind the depiction of a defecating animal. In fact, it is, in a way, a continuation of another tradition of the long Côa Valley artistic cycle: the quite indecent nature of some motifs. From Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic representations of oversized phallus (even in rock 17), to Iron Age zoophilia motifs and ending in lewd contemporary inscriptions we find many examples of, by today's standards, rather obscene depictions in the Côa¹⁴.

Today's engraver draw a horse in a naïve, but at the same time, ill-tempered attempt to

accounts for a fifth of Upper Palaeolithic representations (BAPTISTA 1999: 30).

¹⁴ See, for more examples, BAPTISTA (1999; 126, 167, 173 or 177).

emulate the Palaeolithic ones complementing it with a lewd design, in fact his most important statement. He comes from a completely different context than the Neolithic or Palaeolithic artists, so it is impossible to speak of a direct liaison between the three periods and figures, besides the sort of one way forward communication that can be seen to have taken place among carvers through the motifs they engraved. Nevertheless, stylistically speaking, today's depiction of a horse has nothing to do with the Upper Palaeolithic ones, as, for instance, Iron Age horses have nothing to do with Pleistocene ones. Aesthetically, the defecating horse is a random attempt to make the comic book art style the best suited conveyor of the more important derisory intention...

Discussion

We believe that rock art (or graffiti, for that matter) marks the land and signals human interaction with its constructed environment, an approach akin to that of MURRAY (2004). Why should one be considerably more important than another? Because of age? *Who* makes the decision on what's more important? The decision maker, interprets what now exists, possessing his built-in preconceptions that (arbitrarily?) rank and judge the inscription of yesterday's 'rock art' and today's 'graffiti'. After all, isn't it age alone that secures the value of what was yesterday perhaps neither graffiti nor art, just 'by-products' of human perception, *interpretation* and interaction with the landscape? The concepts that today we understand as 'art' or 'graffiti' come along much later, perhaps in Classical times, with the advent of the Western Modern Global Civilisation, that in reaching overall supremacy¹⁵ led to an

universal use of its very own concepts, namely 'art'¹⁶.

The formal appreciation of the horse motif might also reveal some insights on the possibility for a universal aesthetic apprehension of rock art. For archaeologists, heritage managers and rock art researchers, the horse motif will be frowned upon as vandalism, void of aesthetic significance in its sheer and obscene destructive ugliness. Perhaps just as 'doodles' without any value at all. Interestingly, when the Côa rock art began to be discovered, the local population tried to demote the pre-historic engravings referring to them as valueless 'doodles' made by the water millers that until the 1950's worked on the riverbanks¹⁷ (FERNANDES 2003). Hence, when the archaeologists speak of the (unquestionable for us) scientific and artistic value of the pre-historic engravings they are imposing their particular views and aesthetic standpoint towards the local population. Conversely, the local population does not accept this imposition and mocks the ancient art by calling it *just doodles* or by superimposing a defecating horse on older engravings.

It can be suggested that, in tune with DAVID and WILSON's analysis of graffiti as a mean of social resistance (2004), the 'hunter-artist' was also trying to mark (again) a (hunting) territory that he felt as having been dispossessed by the creation of the PAVC and following imposed limitations to land use due to the protection of the engravings. The party of hunters clearly manifested their resentment

¹⁵ We do not wish to enter in any clash of civilisations argument. We are merely pointing out what for us constitutes an historical fact.

¹⁶ For an interesting discussion on the contemporary Western concept of 'art' by opposition of that of modern primitives see INGOLD (2000); see also HEYD (2005) on the possibility of creating an aesthetic appreciation cross-cultural etiquette for rock art. Furthermore, regarding the discussion evoked in footnote 3, we are quite happy to use the word 'art' for 'rock art'. We do come from a Western context thus belonging to a culture that uses the term 'art' for the concept of 'art' ...

¹⁷ These water millers also produced engravings (sometimes inscribed very near to the panels bearing Pre-historic rock art) that are considered (in fact, as its *last* cycle) part of the long Côa Valley engraving tradition (LUÍS and GARCIA DÍEZ 2008).

to the on-duty guard since they could no longer hunt in the Penascosa area. Since they may have felt bereft with the final outcome of the campaign to preserve the engravings, seen as having been lead by outsiders to the region, the horse's inscription might also be seen as an (ill-tempered) act of social resistance. It does more than just questioning the political decision, perceived locally as imposed by the central government, to abandon the construction of the dam that most of the regional population supported. The horse's engraver (that we strongly believe to have been in the hunting party) is trying to vigorously resist the appropriation of 'his' (hunting) territory by the government and by the archaeologists, both of which were embodied, in his mind, by the Park. Therefore, the inscription of the horse symbolically and tangibly claims back a territory (and its use) felt as lost for the continuation of an important¹⁸ hunting leisure activity. The territory is precisely reclaimed by consciously transforming the ancient motifs, valued by archaeologists, into a new 'composition' that the 'hunter-artist' hoped will be perceived to be less significant – as it will be 'tainted' – and therefore not worthy of protection.

On the other hand, the Neolithic anthropomorphic motif can be in itself an act of vandalism to the integrity of the Upper Palaeolithic goat, also but not only considering its *evident* intentionality. Should we try to make the ithyphallic figure disappear in order to render the goat more visible or to bestow its lost single and original integrity? We believe that both motifs, together, are now considered to be the essence of the panel. With time, conceivably, the defecating horse will also be regarded as such.

Nonetheless, we must not forget that the PAVC is charged with the duty of protecting and preserving a given heritage, scheduled as National Monument by Portuguese law and

considered as World Heritage by UNESCO. From the moment it was classified, the rock art corpus was established as an unchangeable value that allows no 'new additions'¹⁹. It will take some time to even consider that ('very recent') contemporary graffiti could be in fact rock art and therefore eligible for protection and even scheduling according to its merits in the eyes of future archaeologists and heritage managers. Therefore, today's depictions will exist in a sort of a limbo as just illegal vandalism 'waiting' to be considered as rock art²⁰.

This is an uncomfortable dilemma facing present rock art researchers and heritage managers. On one hand, the inscription or painting of graffiti is significantly or completely (depending on the extent, type and location of vandalism acts) disruptive to the integrity and authenticity of any patrimony, whether rock art sites or other, whether inscribed in the World Heritage List or not. Consequently, the inscription of graffiti is a source of concern for any heritage manager. From the moment it was been created the PAVC implemented a management strategy destined to prevent the occurrence of vandalism and graffiti inscription. Nonetheless, it is impossible (or more

¹⁹ A parallel can be drawn here with Petit Jean State Park, Arkansas, USA, where heritage managers decided 'to remove or at least reduce the visual impact of inscriptions created after the park's 1923 formation date' (SWADLEY 2008). This author believes that "Graffiti predating establishment of the park is considered to possess historical value, and *no regulations or laws* were violated when it was made" (SWADLEY 2008; author's emphasis). Therefore, in this case, it was, apparently, quite arbitrarily decided, resorting to the Park's creation date, how to differentiate between historical inscriptions (of interest because they are older than 1923) and graffiti (of no interest because it is younger than 1923)!

²⁰ We should add that today's shepherders (and apparently hunters...) or visitors to the rock art sites (see Figure 7) continue to inscribe motifs or sentences in the rocky outcrops of the Côa Valley. Could these graffiti, which, with the exception of Penascosa 17, are not engraved superimposing ancient rock art, be considered more straightforwardly as (*future*) rock art?

accurately, excruciatingly expensive) to have 24/hours a day surveillance of the now more than 1000 Côa Valley rock art surfaces. However, we believe that if the PAVC's visitor and surveillance management scheme was not in place vandalism and graffiti incidents would be considerably worse²¹.

On the other hand, in the attempt to preserve and protect rock art, heritage management efforts may end by producing the ossification of the landscape and therefore by creating an imaginary, contemporary, crystallised image and reflection of what otherwise is an humanised, thus dynamic, environment (HASKOVEC 1991). It can be argued that the creation of a structure like the PAVC had as a main goal preventing damage to the Côa rock art corpus. In this sense, the ossification of the landscape is an advantage insofar as it helps in the perpetuation of the rock art. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial to strike a balance between these apparently antagonistic points of view since, even resorting to such managing strategies as the ones implemented by the PAVC, graffiti incidents occur and will probably continue to happen. We propose that a case-by-case approach is the best way to cope with graffiti incidents such as the one that occurred in Penascosa rock 17.

We have tried to demonstrate, with the analysis of the very particular case offered to us by rock 17 that trying to classify what is vandalism, graffiti or rock art can be quite difficult. Nevertheless, what insights can conservators, rock art researchers and heritage managers extract from the affair? Are there criteria that can be proposed on how to establish whether a recent inscription should be removed? We believe there will be one straightforward rule of thumb emerging from the rock 17 case analysis: **if the end result is more than just a pure act of vandalism then careful analysis of the possible significance of the new motif in itself and of the ensemble it composes with the previous existing motifs should be carried**

out. In a way, it is a case of establishing if there is an *addition* or *subtraction* of meaning to a panel. As we noted earlier, a *pure vandalism act* will just destroy existing motifs. It is an action devoid of any aesthetic concerns, and without any possible subtext, except perhaps as a last degree form of nihilism. Since by definition we need not worry about the feelings of nihilists, we consider that every effort should be made to restore panels to the previous existing condition before any *pure vandalism* happened. As for all other cases involving more than just *pure vandalism* (i.e., when the end result also comprises graffiti motifs), it will be difficult to argue that subjective, and even affective, constraints will not continue to determine case by case judgments although some principles might be inferred from the rock 17 affair. One relates to the aesthetic qualities a recent graffiti might be judged to contain. Another criterion that might be suggested has to do with the precise value that can be comprehensively established for recent inscriptions. Yet another could be the relevance of the rapport new motifs create with older ones... However, we just attempted, by examining what might be the significance of the horse motif and of some worldwide relevant situations, to show that the prevailing stance on the need to remove all contemporary *graffiti* done in rocky surfaces should be reassessed. Our primary aim is not to propose universal rules or a list of criteria on how to distinguish between 'bad' and 'good' *graffiti*. We are offering our view on how to distinguish between *pure vandalism* and *graffiti*. Hence, we issue an alert to everyone involved, practicing in the related disciplines of heritage management and conservation and rock art research (all with widely accepted rules of professional ethics), on the need of thoroughly evaluating what might be the full significance of a piece of contemporary life we want, today, to erase... forever.

At this point, we must credit Thomas Heyd for suggesting a solution that would perhaps combine today's need to camouflage the graffiti with tomorrow's urge for 'new' rock art to study and classify. In fact, after the

²¹ See, again, FERNANDES (2003) on the visitor management scheme put in place by the PAVC.

presentation of this paper in the Aesthetics and Rock Art IV Symposium in the Global Rock Art conference, Heyd suggested that the horse could be camouflaged now with a relatively fast weathering material that would fade with time making the graffiti reappear in a few hundreds of years or even decades. This could be an elegant and subtle solution. Nevertheless, we should also discuss the technical feasibility of covering up the horse motif without damaging the existent ancient rock art motifs. CARTWRIGHT (1989) or DEAN (1999) report on several problems that might occur when dealing with the removal of graffiti that might end up by worsening an already delicate situation. In fact, if the removal operation is not done by qualified professionals, using the adequate materials and techniques, the outcome may be utterly regrettable. Regarding the case at hands, to the best of our knowledge, the references available on the broad field of graffiti removal deal with painted graffiti not with engraved graffiti. In itself the two situations are completely different: in the case of painted graffiti the objective is to *remove* something that was added to a given rock art surface. When considering engraved graffiti the goal is quite the opposite. To a certain degree, it is a case of *adding* what was removed²², or at least of concealing the new engraving, that is, concealing the removal of surface material. Therefore, the removal of the Rock 17 horse is a delicate operation that, in the areas where lines recently done intersect older motifs, might imply, even if minor, changes and/or damage to the Pre-historic figures. We believe that there is a real likelihood of such alteration, even if the operation is carefully planned and conducted by professionals. Therefore, solely due to preservation reasons, it would perhaps be more advisable to leave Rock 17 in its present condition.

²² The lines resulting from an act of engraving cause the loss of surface material; in fact, an engraved rock art motif is a 'negative' produced by an 'artificial' stone erosion action.

Conclusion

As controversial in nature as it is, the horse motif constitutes a document inscribed in a media that will withstand the trial of (human) time. Furthermore, it will also contribute to give future account on the conflict once held over the preservation of an archaeological site in the late 20th century that changed the way Portuguese people and the State regarded heritage preservation. Certainly there will be more documents (newspaper articles, television broadcasts, books, articles in specialised journals, etc.) that will provide an account of those tribulations. However, none will be inscribed in schist; none will be part of the tradition of engraving motifs in rocky outcrops. Moreover, nowadays we tend to forget, with our almost blind faith in technology, that all contemporary media has a life limit. Naturally there is the possibility to safeguard (with backups and so on) today's relevant data; but can anyone assure its survival for some thousand of years, for the period one can more or less confidently expect (FERNANDES 2007) the rock art outcrops to endure?

The horse motif also states a vigorous opinion on a relevant issue of regional and national contemporary socio-economical life. Interestingly, one of UNESCO's criteria to justify the inclusion of the Côa Valley Pre-historic rock art in the World Heritage List was that "The Côa Valley rock art throws light on the *social, economic*, and spiritual life (...) of the early ancestor of humankind in a wholly exceptional manner." (UNESCO, 1999; author's emphasis). Will contemporary 'rock art' be available for future humans (or something else...!) that want to throw light on and study the socio-economic context that surrounded, at the end of the 20th century, the attempt to manage and preserve an ensemble of rock art from different epochs? For this is a conflict that has deeper ramifications insofar as it echoes present-day contradictions regarding the production of social science but also the appropriation and 'ownership' of

(cultural) landscapes and the aesthetic perception of (rock) art.

Any given rock art site exists in a specific humanly understood and modified landscape, of which rock art (and graffiti) are obviously part. The continuance of the tradition of engraving stony surfaces is proof that in a given context the human-landscape interpretation and adapting relationship is a dynamic one. It proves that the landscape is still 'alive', reflecting different (*artistic*) values, attitudes and beliefs that opposing as they might be all contribute to enhance, shape and enrich our relation with it. In the Côa Valley, it was natural for humans of different times to celebrate their existence by leaving marks in the schist outcrops. Today humans still leave tangible vestiges of their ephemeral passage through the valley. Might these today aesthetically and scientifically unvalued doodles be the untouchable rock art of the future? After all, if one can be allowed some esotericism, it was not (any of) the engravers' fault, the rock made them do it...

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